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A middle school corrective reading program utilizing paraprofessionals is described. From more than 100 applications, 24 individuals were selected to participate in the paraprofessional training program which considered the following areas of instruction: psychology, rapport, ethics, audiovisual aids, motivation, sequential reading skills, and practical experience. It lasted 6 weeks and was supplemented by weekly 2-hour inservice training programs throughout the school year. Five middle schools in Hammond, Indiana, were selected to participate in the experimental Title III/ESEA project. Each school was assigned four paraprofessionals who provided corrective reading instruction and content area tutoring to 40 pupils--10 per paraprofessional. One director and three reading specialists performed diagnostic and supervisory functions. Pupils participating in the experimental and control groups were selected from those pupils referred by the classroom teacher for corrective reading aid. Parental involvement was encouraged through meetings and individual conferences. No conclusions regarding the worth of the project could be made, although most administrators, teachers, and parents were favorable toward it. (RT)

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UTILIZATION OF PARA-PROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL IN CORRECTIVE READING

Title III ESEA

January, 1969

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School City of Hammond, Indiana

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This corrective reading program is currently operational in the middle schools in the School City of Hammond, Indiana. The population of Hammond is approximately 120,000 with a pupil population during the school year 1968 - 1969 of 23,584. Enrollment in middle schools, grades six, seven, and eight is 5,083 of which in excess of 800 pupils are identified each year as having reading disabilities.

A summer corrective reading program has been available to pupils from both public and parochial schools since 1963, but during an eight week summer program, little lasting reading growth may be expected. A corrective reading program is existent during the school year, but due to limited number of staff members, only an approximate number of 200 pupils may receive corrective reading aid as a part of the curriculum. These pupils are selected from grades four through eight, so in actuality fewer than 150 pupils from the middle schools participate in the corrective reading program provided by certified staff members.

The Hammond Public School System is commited to the concept of a middle school program, grades six, seven and eight. The transition from the 8-4 plan and the 6-6 plan is gradually taking place as existing buildings are being reorganized and new construction of middle schools is being completed. In general, the philosophy of the corrective reading program has been to provide intensive help to pupils preparing to enter high school in an effort to better prepare them for extensive content area study. The emphasis of middle school corrective aid rather than primary and intermediate preventive and developmental instruction may be questioned by some reading specialists, but we have found pupil growth and subsequent accomplishment rewarding at these grade levels.

Recognizing the numbers of pupils requiring aid in the middle schools and our lack of staff available to provide the services required, another solution was sought. One possible solution was a better utilization of the skills and knowledge of our certified staff. In order to determine the advisability of the move we were considering, a certain amount of experimentation and evaluation was deemed necessary. The Title III ESEA funds were available and after application to the federal government, some 170,000 dollars was granted to us for a two

year study in the use of para-professional personnel in intensive corrective reading instruction.

In June 1967, final approval of the federal grant was received and recruitment of para-professional personnel began with a news release announcing that the School City of Hammond was seeking, "Born Teachers." Throughout the week following the news release, more than 100 applications were submitted to the project director. Appointments were then made and personal interviews were conducted. On the basis of the job requirements and subsequent personal interview evaluation, twenty-four individuals were selected to participate in the para-professional training program. After having been involved in working with para-professional personnel for a period of two years, the project director feels the selection of such personnel is basic to the success of their use.

A brief description of the individuals ultimately selected would be appropriate at this time. Ten of the para-professionals had graduated from high school and twelve had some college course work. All twenty-two had some experience in working with children such as, scout leader, Sunday school teacher, or substitute teacher. One of the para-professionals had even taught school for four years when only two years of college was required for certification. Few of the para-professionals

had been employed in any other wage earning occupation. All were what one would consider civic-minded and had been involved in numerous volunteer service organizations. Nearly one-half of those accepted as para-professionals had a child who had experienced difficulty in academic achievement in school at some time. They wanted to be involved in a program which would benefit this type of pupil. Only one of the para-professionals was unmarried, and she was following a course of teacher preparation at one of the local universities.

Our standards for selection were high, but in order to assure success of the project, we felt no compromise could be made. We trained twenty-four para-professionals but employed only the twenty who most competently completed the training program. The other four have been utilized as substitutes in the project and have participated in additional training programs.

In determining the content of the training program, consideration was given to the following areas of instuction:

PSYCHOLOGY The para-professional staff was to be working with underachieving adolescents. Both an adolescent and an underachiever possess traits which demand an understanding and skill of motiva-

tion not required by other grade levels or other pupils.

RAPPORT Any non-certified staff member needs to be cognizant of teacher-pupil relationships, teacher-teacher relationships, and teacher-parent relationships. Although we were not proposing that para-professionals assume the same role as teacher, it was felt that in order to perceive their own relationship to the professional staff, a realistic understanding needed to be developed.

ETHICS The non-professional was provided with information regarding the legal and ethical implications of her position in the classroom, and the concept of professional behavior was emphasized. School city policy and individual building policies were throughly investigated and discussed.

AUDIO-VISUAL AIDS The para-professionals were provided instruction in the use of audio-visual equipment as well as a study of audio-visual materials available for use in the corrective reading area. Emphasis was placed on the use of equipment designed specifically for improvement of reading skills.

MOTIVATION Methods and techniques of motivation of pleasure reading were emphasized extensively

throughout the training program. As a central theme of the Hammond corrective reading program is a belief that if one has a desire or personal need to read, he will read and will consequently improve his reading skills.

SEQUENTIAL READING SKILLS Para-professionals were to be reteaching skills to pupils who had displayed weakness in specific areas: therefore, much time was spent in work with methods, techniques, and materials designed to give corrective aid to pupils.

PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE Forty hours were spent by the para-professionals in the classrooms of the summer corrective reading program, during which time they:

observed teachers

prepared lesson plans

studied materials

worked with small groups

In evaluating the training program, the para-professionals felt this experience was the most valuable portion of their preparation.

The staff providing instruction for the training program was obtained solely from the Hammond Public School System. In as much as we wanted the Title III project to parallel the corrective reading program already operative in the

schools and to be consistent with the philosophy and policies of Hammond, we felt this utilization of our own staff to be imperative.

Following is a list of the personnel who provided guidance and instruction throughout the training program:

Assistant Superintendent - Curriculum and Instruction

Director of Psychological Services

Director of Attendance and Welfare

Director of Special Education

Coordinator of Language Arts and Reading

Assistant Director of Elementary Education

Director of Summer Corrective Reading Program

Director of Title III - Para-professional Reading

Principal, secondary

Principal, elementary

Language arts teachers (2)

Corrective Reading teachers (5)

Within a period of six weeks during the summer of 1967, para-professionals were selected, received training, and the program was publicized. This segment of our Title III project had been completed and was ready to become operational. Further training of the para-

professionals continue throughout the school year in weekly two hour in-service training programs. This phase of the training program will be discussed later in this report.

In addition to the twenty para-professionals assigned to the project, funds were allocated for one director and three reading specialists to perform in diagnostic and supervisory capacities. Each of these supervising teachers have the following responsibilities:

1. Administer and interpret diagnostic instruments
2. Prepare reports of skill disabilities
3. Prescribe instruction to correct skill disabilities
4. Select appropriate reading materials to use with each pupil
5. Evaluate performance of the para-professional personnel
6. Supervise instruction to correct skill disability
7. Supervise the para-professionals' reporting of pupil progress to parents, school, and reading center
8. Provide in-service training for the para-professional personnel
9. Coordinate the para-professional corrective reading program with the certified teachers' reading program
10. Participate in parent/para-professional conferences

11. Provide instruction for a limited number of pupils requiring corrective reading aid

12. Assist in the compliation of data pertinent to the experimental project

In order to allow non-professionals to function in an instructional capacity, highly trained specialists had to be utilized in initiating, planning, programing and selecting appropriate instructional methods, techniques, and materials. We are employing to the greatest advantage the skills and knowledge of three specialists to meet the needs of approximately two hundred pupils rather than the one hundred they could provide instruction in a clinical setting.

The implementation of the project in the school year 1967-1968 followed the following design. Five middle schools (grades six, seven and eight) were selected to participate in the experimental project. One of these was a Catholic parocial school. Each school was assigned four para-professionals who provided corrective reading instruction and content area tutoring to forty pupils -- ten pupils per para-professional. Each of the para-professionals work with only five pupils at a time so each had two classes.

Available in each building was a language arts teacher to assist the para-professionals in adjusting to building procedure, perusing permanent records (Para-professionals are

not allowed access to these records), coordinating tutorial activities, and serving in general as liaison between teachers and para-professionals. The reading specialists were assigned to para-professionals whom they would supervise and for whose pupils they would assume the instructional responsibility. The language arts teachers have not been employed during the second year of the project due to the ready acclimation of the para-professionals into the building procedures.

Pupils who were to participate in the experimental and control groups of the project were selected from those pupils referred by the classroom teacher for corrective reading aid. The basic criteria for teacher referral included:

1. Average intelligence - 85 I.Q. or above on a group intelligence test
   - 90 I.Q. or above on an individual intelligence test
2. Retarded Reader - On the basis of a standardized test score the pupils should be at least one year of reading achievement below the grade placement at the administration of the test.

In making the final selection of pupils for the project the following measures and criteria were employed:

1. Administration of the Verbal Section of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children
2. Administration of the Gray Oral Reading Paragraphs
3. Administration of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test Level II

An I.Q. of 90 or above was desirable, but an I.Q. of 85 was considered acceptable. An indication of reading achievement at least one year below grade placement was mandatory.

During the first year of the project pupils were scheduled in four different ways:

25% met three days per week for one semester

25% met five days per week for one semester

25% met three days per week for two semesters

25% met five days per week for two semesters

In each case in following the project proposal, the pupils met thirty minutes on the days assigned for reading instruction and thirty minutes at a later time for tutorial aid in a content area. This was totally unacceptable to teachers, pupils, and parents for the following reasons:

1. Middle school classes in most buildings are forty-five minutes in length; consequently, the pupils were missing at least two/thirds of two separate academic classes.
2. Teachers could not evaluate pupil performance when the child might be present for class only

fifteen minutes per day or at best two full class periods per week.

3. By asking para-professionals to tutor in content areas, we were asking more knowledge and skill of them than we would of certified staff members. The para-professionals were given extensive training in the teaching of reading skills. Beyond this area of instruction we were asking performance for which they were almost totally unprepared.
4. The result of this form of scheduling was an extreme amount of pressure on pupils who, considering their disabilities, needed a release from pressures.

In order to eliminate the scheduling problems during the second year of the project, pupils have been scheduled almost exclusively from language arts classes for a period of forty-five minutes per day five days per week. This scheduling is consistent with the rest of the middle school program and has resulted in greater harmony with faculty, parents, and pupils. The certified reading teachers also employ this scheduling format.

Parent involvement has been effected in several different ways. As the program first became operational, the project

director and the para-professionals met with the parents of pupils in the experimental group to explain Title III ESEA, the objectives of the project, and the involvement of the pupils. Many parents were threatened by the program because they professed no prior knowledge of the child's academic weakness. Others were concerned that the child might be mentally retarded. During this first parent conference an attempt was made to allay these fears through a factual explanation regarding the criteria of pupil selection which demanded average or above intelligence with reading achievement at least one year below the pupil's grade placement.

Following the first report to parents which was an indication of reading disabilities diagnosed through the use of the standardized instruments and teacher-made devices, individual conferences were held with parents to explain thoroughly the pupil's weakness with specific skill areas. A question which most interested parents asked was, "What can I do at home to help my child improve in reading?' On the basis of this question a city-wide workshop for parents of children with reading problems was planned. This workshop had several purposes:

To involve parents in the improvement of the pupil's reading skills

To give parents an insight into the characteristics of an underachieving adolescent

To help parents adopt a realistic attitude toward academic expectations for the pupil who had a reading disability

To provide specific suggestions for home assistence in the building of reading skills

Our objective was to involve 25% of the pupils' parents in the workshop. This objective was not met, but of the approximately one hundred adults attending the workshop a general response was that more of this type of parent involvement in the school was desired.

The design of this workshop involved an outside consultant who served as main speaker and set the tone for the session, followed by small study groups which parents selected on the basis of interest and a feeling of need for guidance. The professional staff of the Hammond Public Schools as well as reading specialists from nearby communities served as discussion leaders for the small group sessions.

Individual parent conferences are held throughout the school year at the request of the parent or the para-professional. In each conference a certified staff member acts as spokesman for the project with the para-professional serving as the background advisor regarding specific behavior and learning patterns of the pupil in the classroom. Although some conferences have been

called due to disciplinary breakdown, most have been arranged to discussed pupil growth in reading.

This project has been coordinated with the regular school corrective reading program primarily through the reporting system employed. In addition to the growth reports to parents, a report is also circulated in the building among the pupil's teachers and a third copy of this report is kept in the reading canter files. The reading center report is forwarded with the child's complete reading record to any corrective reading teacher to whom he may be assigned at a future date.

The para-professionals' work closely relates with the classroom teachers' through informal building conferences and participation in faculty meetings and school social events. In only isolated instances have the para-professionals been considered a threat to the certified teacher. These were a result of a breakdown in communication more so than a strong objection of the teacher to non-certified staff being utilized in the educational program. At no time have the certified reading teachers exhibited anything other than appreciation for the aid para-professionals can give them in helping children learn how to read.

The implementation of the project necessarily determined to a great extent the content of the weekly in-service training programs as unforseen circumstances were encountered. The tutorial aspect of the program resulted in the utilization of

coordinators of various areas.

In as much as possible pupils have been drawn from language arts and social studies classes to participate in the project. In order to facilitate tutoring in these areas, the Coordinator of the Social Studies, the Director of Homebound Services, and a Master teacher of Language Arts have been brought in to discuss methods, techniques, and materials available for middle school pupils which would serve to develop the concept being presented in the regular class without resorting to a chapter by chapter study of the state adopted text.

Classroom control and the manipulating of individual instruction with ease have been the topics for discussion at several of the in-service meetings. These discussions provided an opportunity for review of much of the instruction which was provided in the original training program.

Reading specialists served as speakers on several occasions to assist the para-professionals through a sharing of ideas for motivational bulletin boards, techniques to stimulate pleasure reading, teacher-made supplements, methods of material presentation which would provide classroom variety, suggestions for more efficient planning and use of study skill development in improving comprehension skills.

A great deal of time has been spent with para-professionals in the preparation of reports to parents and teachers to provide information which could be utilized and easily understood.

Since the program is experimental, the para-professionals have had to administer and compile information from data gathering instruments. Instruction in the administration of these devices was provided during the in-service training programs.

In order to facilitate the use of materials, all those available were cross-referenced to enable the para-professionals to have immediate access to specific skill development supplements. This was a time consuming process, but at the conclusion of this assignment, the para-professionals were completely familiar with the materials available and the recommended use with each diagnosed disability.

Providing additional understanding of underachievers were members of the Psychology Department of the School City of Hammond. As the para-professionals gain in experience, they find their pupils becoming more open with them, and much of the adolescent psychology instruction they have received takes on new meaning due to this confrontation with actual involvement in the child's behavior, attitude, and self-concept. They have been increasingly able to employ psychological principles within the small groups in order to motivate desired pupil academic achievement.

In general, no conclusion regarding the worth of this project can as yet be drawn. Any findings regarding pupil

growth cannot yet be evaluated because of the limited number of pupils in the sample who have been administered both pre-test and post-test measures. However, if one cannot make judgements regarding the instructional value of the para-professionals until a later time, the following observations can readily be made:

1. Administrators favor the program because of the numbers of pupils who can receive aid.

2. Most teachers favor the program because they can see improved academic growth and improved pupil attitude toward school.

3. Parents favor the program because many of the pupils have not previously had an opportunity to receive corrective reading aid.

4. Para-professionals serve as good-will ambassadors to the community.

5. The program has served to motivate a number of para-professionals to return to school to complete requirements for teacher certification.

6. The para-professionals have worked in the summer corrective reading program assigned to a certified classroom teacher in an aide capacity, and the certified teachers found their knowledge and skills to be an attribute to pupils' individual instruction.

7. Negative comments have been regarding pupil selection, pupil scheduling and vague reporting. It is felt that some of these problems have already been alleviated and that others can be rectified as our experience in the use of para-professional personnel increases.

The director of the project feels that this type of a program

has one distinct advantage in that it provides for a better use of the expertise of the reading specialist than has been possible prior to this time. As the final statistical evaluation is completed definite implications regarding the use of para-professional personnel in an instructional situation should be made apparent.